



ADHD in the Workplace

ADHD in the workplace can be difficult to navigate but there are several things that employers can do to help someone struggling with the condition. While it can be portrayed negatively, there are a lot of positives to hiring people with ADHD. Understanding the condition and adjusting management styles helps to bring out the best in ADHD employees. Adults with ADHD often perform well in the workplace, once they understand their symptoms or with extra support from the work team and managers.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition. People can seem restless, have trouble concentrating and act on impulse. The exact cause is unknown, but it is thought to run in families. Medication can be prescribed by a GP, but it may not work for everyone.

ADHD is thought to present in three different ways. It is possible to have a combination of each of these different types:

Inattentive

Concentration difficulties, short-term and working memory difficulties, organisational difficulties, often losing things, struggles to start activities, easily distracted.

Impulsiveness

Acting or speaking without thinking, blurting out, inappropriate, difficulty in controlling emotions.

Hyperactivity

Need to fidget, feeling restless, excessive talking, unable to wait their turn, little sense of danger (risk assessment), being unable to sit still.

Frequently Asked ADHD Questions

Is ADHD the same as autism?

No. ADHD is not on the autistic spectrum although there are many overlaps in symptoms. Comorbid ADHD (meaning you have another closely related condition) can combine with dyslexia, dyspraxia, tics, autism, or oppositional defiance disorder (ODD). It is thought that 50% of people also have another condition.

Can you develop other conditions if you have ADHD?

ADHD people are at higher risk of developing mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety. Studies find that 80 percent of people with attention deficit disorder will have at least one other psychiatric disorder in their lifetime. The two most common are depression and anxiety disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

Can you cure ADHD?

No. There are many ways of helping to manage ADHD such as life coaching, apps, or medication. Each person is different so what works for one person may not work for another.

Do people grow out of it?

No. There is a common misconception that ADHD people can grow out of it, but this is not the case. ADHD people can get better at 'masking' the symptoms giving the impression that they are managing their ADHD but are often still struggling. The concept of masking or the cost of passing is

borrowed from the autistic community and refers to neurodiverse people attempting to appear neurotypical but feeling extra tired as a result.

ADHD does not need to be negative. It has a lot of positive aspects for a business.

Strengths

Risk calculation

ADHD people are more likely to take risks than neurotypical people. They can think creatively spotting patterns and connections that others may not.

High energy

Managed correctly this can mean that ADHD can produce large amounts of work in a short space of time

Hyper focus

ADHD is about the dysregulation of focus and concentration. A stereotype is that they cannot concentrate. This can be true at times but also, ADHD people can be extremely focused when they are engaged with a task.

Thinking creatively

ADHD people can see patterns or connections where neurotypicals cannot. They are also great at divergent thinking tasks such as brainstorming and coming up with new ideas.

Good crisis managers

ADHD people are great in crisis situations. It is thought that ADHD people produce more theta waves than neurotypical people. Theta waves mean a

deep state of relaxation, so the overproduction means ADHD people are excellent at staying calm.

Difficulties

Inattentiveness

Although it can appear as if ADHD people are not paying attention to their work, this is often not the case. They can sometimes not see mistakes in their work or make the same ones repeatedly.

Risk calculation

Sometimes this can lead to impulse decision making.

Flexible

ADHD can struggle to adapt to change without getting overwhelmed. Routine is a very important part of managing daily life with ADHD so any changes can feel scary or bigger than they are.

Overwhelming

This relates to the 'cost of passing' which means neurodiverse people may be more tired than neurotypical people. They often use more mental energy in processing daily life or functioning. Sometimes, large or lots of tasks can feel overwhelming or tiredness can lead to ADHD people needing extra rest.

Blurting out or oversharing

ADHD people can sometimes appear to have no filter when it comes to the workplace sharing inappropriate things or talking over people.

Procrastination

Some ADHD people can struggle to get started on tasks, especially if they are not interested in them.

Sensory overload

ADHD people can be hyperaware of their surroundings, especially when it comes to noise. It can be difficult to block out unwanted thoughts and intrusive noises leading to extra tiredness and sensitivity.

Low self-esteem

Neurotypical people can be extra sensitive to criticism so may critique their work harshly or internalise comments they see as negative. Over time this can lead to a lack of confidence and low self-esteem.

Rejection Sensitivity Dysmorphia

Rejection-sensitive dysphoria (RSD) is often associated with ADHD. It means extreme emotional sensitivity and pain which is caused when a person with RSD feels they have been rejected or criticised. It could also be caused by a sense of falling short in meeting their own goals or objectives in life. The emotional response hurts more than it does for people without RSD in that it can be unbearable, restricting, and highly impairing.

How an Employer can help

Breaks

Allowing extra breaks can help to keep attention from wandering during long tasks. Alternatively, it can help to break hyper focus which can mean an ADHD person doesn't take regular breaks or remember to eat. A reminder for the person to take a break could also help.

Encourage the use of notes, apps and audio recording in meetings

ADHD works well with lists that can be ticked off as each task is completed. It facilitates an easier understanding of the steps involved in a task or project.

Be clear on expectations

Ensuring that everyone knows their role and understands who is responsible for which action can avoid confusion later. Lists of actions for the ADHD person which they are responsible for is helpful.

Allowing headphones

ADHD minds are noisy! Headphones can help to block out any necessary noises from an office – especially open-plan ones.

Understand it may take someone longer to learn a new skill

Not everyone learns in the same way. Understanding that it may take someone longer to learn, being patient and asking how you can help them are great ways to ensure the person does not feel pressured or upset. Consider changing your explanation to accommodate such as demonstrating rather than telling or writing short bullet point steps to avoid overwhelming them.

Allow breaks in longer meetings where people can physically move if needed

Longer meetings can be difficult to maintain focus in. Allowing ADHD people to break away briefly.

Understanding what ADHD attention looks like

ADHD is not about a lack of focus but a dysregulation of it. ADHD people may be doodling on notepads, singing, or fiddling with toys which appears as if they are not paying attention however, this is the opposite. Be patient

and understand that people can focus in different ways and attention spans vary.

Inform your employee about Access to Work Grants which can help fund apps and counselling

This can help to cover the costs of equipment needed to help manage their daily lives or funding towards app life coaching and counselling.

Give constructive, quiet and positive feedback

Neurodiverse people can be extra sensitive toward criticism. Studies have shown that by the age of 12, ADHD hear 20,000 more negative messages than their neurotypical counterparts. This can lead to low self-esteem, a lack of self-confidence or depression. Potentially consider framing negative feedback within positive comments or being encouraging when talking to ADHD people about how their work could improve.

Dealing with inappropriate behaviour

ADHD people can have lowered risk perception along with poor impulse control. The term, #nofilter really applies here! Sometimes, processing what is inappropriate language or oversharing can be extra difficult in a professional setting. This may be easier to explain if the wider team are aware of an ADHD diagnosis but should not be used as an excuse to tell others if the person is not comfortable.

Quiet spaces

This allows ADHD people a safe space to retreat to when they feel overwhelmed or need to feel calm.

Opportunities to work with flexible time and potentially from home

Flexibility with neurodiverse staff can lead to a happier work environment. It also avoids ADHD people feeling they are stuck in an office which may not be adapted to their needs or distracting.

Allow work to be delegated such as note-taking or proofreading

If someone is struggling to focus in a meeting where tasks are being assigned, then they may miss vital information. Having a 'note buddy' could be a big help where they can access the most important parts of the meeting afterwards or it may allow them to skip a long meeting.

Short tasks

This could help ADHD people to maintain their energy more successfully.

Fidget or chew toys

Fidget toys may look like a distraction but they can help to focus physical energy during meetings.

Clocks or alarms

Setting reminders for meetings can help if someone is struggling with time management or executive dysfunction.

Extra support buddies or one on one meetings

Encouraging a calm, safe space where they can discuss how they are coping with work with a colleague or mental health support team. The person may or may not report back to management about what could be done to better support.

Visual reminders or diaries

Setting physical reminders in the room that breaks at a certain time or for other information can help ADHD people to access information quickly without having to ask or feeling upset that they cannot remember.

Extra Help

ADHD management apps

ADHD Life Coaching

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Recognising ADHD Burn Out

ADHD symptoms such as emotional regulation, low self-worth, impulse control, RSD, anxiety and sensory issues along with everyday work and life can become overwhelming. The extra energy that is expended by attempting to cope can also contribute to the problem leading to emotional, physical and mental exhaustion. ADHD, especially those with RSD, struggle with self-compassion meaning they may keep working longer hours, take on harsh workloads or overcompensate in order to 'prove their worth' to their employer.

Disclosing ADHD

A lot of people with a diagnosis may feel uncomfortable discussing their ADHD. This is due to fears that they may be seen as a less desirable candidate for a job or promotion or that they may be treated differently by their colleagues causing embarrassment. Some people with ADHD can have internalised shame or anxiety around having ADHD. It's important that they have a quiet, safe space to disclose this, and the choice is theirs as to if they tell their colleagues or not.

A colleague's ADHD can affect the wider office. It can also lead to confusion if special allowances are made, so it can help to disclose but that decision should be discussed first. However, if an employee asks that it is kept confidential which means clarifying who has access to their information.

It's important to offer support and ask how their ADHD could be accommodated in the workspace. This could be as simple as offering extra one on one meetings or even allowing short breaks in the workday.

References

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